

Sighting of Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* near Mahuva, Bhavnagar: a third record for Gujarat

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On 28 November 2020, we were on the road from Naip Village to Nikol, which is an unpaved road, when we chanced upon an unusual dove in the area. Since we were aware of the recent sighting of Namaqua Dove (*Oena capensis*) from Gujarat, we could immediately identify this bird as a male Namaqua Dove. The dove was feeding on the road and would fly and perch on a *Prosopis juliflora* when it was disturbed. It used to come down on the road and continue feeding if there was no disturbance. It perched on the *Prosopis* tree and used to start preening. We observed it for almost two hours and took many photographs and recorded short videos of its activities. This location - 21° 5' 50.29" N, 71° 51' 34.98" E) - is around 1.5 km from the sea, near the wetland Nikol *bandhara*, and the habitat has *Prosopis* trees and other shrubs. We saw it only once and it was not seen again in the area even though we searched for it in the following days.

Plumage: This individual was superficially similar to some *Streptopelia* sp. doves but it was much smaller and the tail was very long. It had greyish-white crown, black face and upper breast, dark eye, bill with red base and yellow tip, brownish mantle, grey wing-coverts, red legs, white belly and a very long pointed tail. When seen in flight, the primaries were chestnut, both above and below, and were attractive when visible in flight. We could easily age it as an adult male.

Its behaviour was similar to other *Streptopelia* sp. doves. It was feeding on grass seeds and stems, and on other seeds which were present on the ground. A Namaqua Dove was recently seen in Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, near Jamnagar, which was the first record of the species for Gujarat as well as India (Trivedi & Trivedi 2018, Patel & Raol 2018). It was recently (first week of November 2020) seen in Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary (see elsewhere in this issue – Eds) and thus, this is the third record of the Namaqua Dove from Gujarat and India. However, this is the first time an adult male has been seen here. The previous sightings were either of juvenile or female and this individual was a colourful male.

Looking at the plumage, its behaviour and other observations (feeding and foraging), we are certain that this individual was not an escapee. A recent paper on the range expansion of the Namaqua Dove in the Palearctic and South Asia explained the expanding range of this species and the Jamnagar record was treated as a part of the range expansion (Ławicki 2020). Now, there are two more records of the species from Gujarat and it seems that the range expansion is really happening and it is possible that in a few years, it could be a regular visitor here! It should be noted that all the sightings so far have been in the winter months, which is not the breeding season of this species. It is possible that it could be a winter migrant here at present but could establish itself in the future.

References

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